



## WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON INVASIVE SPECIES

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### For Immediate Release

### LEAFY SPURGE THREATENS WISCONSIN'S GRASSLANDS

Madison— Leafy spurge, or *Euphorbia esula*, is a Eurasian plant that has the capacity to negatively impact not only grassland vegetation but also grazing cattle. Its greatest abundance is in the northern Great Plains of the U.S. and Canada. In North Dakota, for example, it infests more than 900,000 acres, incurring approximately \$86 million per year in business losses. In Wisconsin, most land managers face isolated patches of leafy spurge, but the longer one waits to initiate control measures, the more expensive and the less successful the battle becomes. Leafy spurge is found along roadsides, in parks, pastures, cultivated fields, and native grasslands, and is classified as a noxious weed in Wisconsin. As an invasive species, leafy spurge is a concern of Governor Jim Doyle. "Grazing and agriculture are vital components of Wisconsin's economy," Governor Doyle said. "We must work to stop the expansion of leafy spurge in Wisconsin to protect these resources."

The strange-looking greenish-yellow flowers of leafy spurge appear in the summer. This plant spreads by exploding its seeds up to 15 feet as well as by sending out underground runners, spreading from one to three feet per year. Roots can grow up to 15 feet deep with a density of up to 1,800 stems per square yard. It is this formidable growth rate, along with a penchant for producing a toxic latex sap, that causes big problems for landowners around Wisconsin. Leafy spurge displaces desirable grassland plants by monopolizing water, light and nutrients, reducing pasture productivity up to 75 percent. This plant also produces a toxic latex that prevents the growth of other plants and can cause illness in cattle who consume it.

Leafy spurge can be nearly eradicated by repeated cultivation for two years. Repeatedly till infested areas to 3 to 4 inches deep, maintaining a plant height of four inches or less. Avoid spreading root pieces and seeds to uninfested areas with equipment! Reducing or halting this plant's spread by seed is recommended through mowing during flowering. Herbicides such as glyphosate and imazapic may help in subduing and even eradicating leafy spurge, but only with multiple years of consistent treatment. Follow herbicide labels for proper application rates and procedures. Consult local NRCS or UW-Extension agents for regulations relating to management of pastures and lands in the Conservation Reserve Program. For more information, see [dnr.state.wi.us/invasives/fact/spurge.htm](http://dnr.state.wi.us/invasives/fact/spurge.htm).

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